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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, May 15, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THE PERISHABLE VITAMINS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Friday is not our regular question-and-answer day, but I am going to answer a question just the same. When a good listener writes that the one topic she wants to hear about is vitamins -- when she puts a request that urgently, I wouldn't refuse for the world.

The vitamins this listener asks about are the 2 that the nutritionists often refer to as the "perishable vitamins" -- that is, B and C. You might describe them as "highly essential but hard to hang on to". Nutrition research has showed that they are both necessary to good health, but that, unfortunately, they are easy to destroy and, also unfortunately, the body can't store them. This is why the nutritionists say that we need to replenish our supply every day.

To be sure of having enough of these vitamins every day, you need to check on 2 counts. First, you need to know which foods to choose to furnish vitamins B and C. And, then, you need to know how to prepare these foods for the table to save as much of the vitamins as possible.

Suppose we talk over vitamin B. Oddly enough, though it comes second in the alphabet, it was the first vitamin discovered. Some people call this the "appetite vitamin" because it plays an important part in maintaining good appetite and also helps keep the intestinal tract in good condition. Lack of vitamin B in extreme cases causes a kind of paralysis long known as beriberi. As it happened, it was a scientist's observation of beriberi in connection with the diet of the people who suffered from it that led to the discovery of vitamin B.

Many foods contain this vitamin but few contain very much of it. You may be interested to hear the foods which the nutritionists have found are the best sources of vitamin B. Such common vegetables as potatoes, sweet-potatoes, carrots, parsnips, cabbage, greens of various kinds -- in fact, practically all the vegetables contain it. Beans and peas are especially good sources because we eat the whole seed, containing the germ portion, which happens to be especially rich in vitamin B. Whole-grain cereals are also good sources. So are lean meat, liver and other edible organs. Fruits furnish a little and so does milk.



As for the second perishable vitamin -- vitamin C, this has answered an age-old health question of mankind: the cause and cure of scurvy. From ancient times the world knew this plague called scurvy. It afflicted armies, the crews of sailing ships, explorers -- any people who had to do without fresh fruits and vegetables for a considerable time. In time, experience taught people that lemon juice would prevent scurvy so the British navy made lemons a compulsory part of its sailors' rations. But nobody knew why these lemons were effective.

Now we know that scurvy is an acute form of malnutrition coming from lack of this vitamin. Mild forms of scurvy are not uncommon now -- bringing sore gums, loose teeth and sore joints. Whether this ill is mild or severe depends on how low the sufferer's diet has been in vitamin C. But nowadays we know the foods that prevent this trouble. We know that all the citrus fruits are rich in vitamin C -- oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, limes and lemons, and that this vitamin C in lemons was what saved the British navy from scurvy. So citrus fruits stand at the top of the list of vitamin-C foods along with tomatoes, which, fortunately are good sources fresh or canned. Other fruits and vegetables lose so much of their vitamin C when cooked that nutritionists advise us to depend chiefly on raw fresh fruits or vegetables for our supply of this vitamin. They suggest using fresh fruit or fruit juice daily, emphasizing citrus fruit or tomatoes. They also suggest fruit or raw vegetable salads.

Because babies live so largely on milk, they are at once affected with symptoms of scurvy if their food does not provide enough vitamin C. Pasteurized milk does not provide it because the heat of the pasteurizing process destroys what little of this vitamin is in raw milk. This is why orange or tomato juice has a place even in the young baby's diet today. Of course, breast-fed babies get all the vitamin C their mothers' milk contains, but they also need orange or tomato juice as a precaution against the sore gums that are the first signs of scurvy.

Now about saving these perishable vitamins. Most of the foods that furnish them are the ones we usually cook. We cook the meats, whole-grain cereals, dried peas and beans which contain the vitamin B. This vitamin dissolves in water and is also sensitive to heat but is somewhat less perishable than vitamin C. The best way to save vitamin B is to use all the juices and the cooking liquids. Use meat juices in gravy or soup; cook whole-grain cereals and dried peas and beans until all the water is absorbed.

Both heat and exposure to the air affect that very perishable vitamin C. So the nutritionists advise not cutting fruit or squeezing the juice until shortly before using.

When fresh foods are cooked, you can help save vitamins by quick cooking. Since water dissolves both these vitamins and heat destroys C very rapidly and B somewhat, cook only long enough to make the vegetable tender and palatable. And, don't cook vegetables with soda because it destroys both vitamin B and vitamin C.

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